



REP. TOM MIELKE



REP. ED ORCUTT

18TH DISTRICT UPDATE ON THE 2004 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

REP. TOM MIELKE

COMMITTEES:

Criminal Justice & Corrections
(ranking Republican)
Local Government
Transportation

OLYMPIA OFFICE:

433 John L. O'Brien Building
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
360-786-7850

E - MAIL:

mielke_th@leg.wa.gov

INTERNET PAGE:

[http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/
members/mielke](http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/mielke)

REP. ED ORCUTT

COMMITTEES:

Agriculture & Natural
Resources
Capital Budget
Finance

OLYMPIA OFFICE:

415 John L. O'Brien Building
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
360-786-7812

E - MAIL:

orcutt_ed@leg.wa.gov

INTERNET PAGE:

[http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/
members/orcutt](http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/orcutt)

LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE:

1-800-562-6000

LEGISLATIVE INFO ON THE INTERNET:

www.leg.wa.gov

STATE GOVERNMENT ON THE INTERNET:

www.access.wa.gov

February 2004

Dear Friends,

The 2004 legislative session brought state lawmakers to Olympia on January 12 for 60 days of addressing issues and concerns from the economy to education. This year offers us **great opportunities to move the state forward** in many areas.

As with all sessions, there are significant ideas being considered that affect you and your family. This letter covers some issues you might be interested in. You'll receive one more letter like this shortly after the session ends in mid-March. We hope to have some good news to report.

Each time we contemplate an issue or a bill as your legislators, we first think about **how it affects Southwest Washington and jobs**. As always, we welcome your input during these processes. Though we spend two or three months in Olympia each year, **we're your legislators all year**. Our job is to serve and represent you, so please contact us if we can help.

Call us using the toll-free legislative hotline, send e-mails, write letters, or stop in for a visit if you are in the Olympia area during the session. We also invite you to attend our Town Hall meetings in the district February 28. Your government works better when you're involved!

In your service,

Tom Mielke *Ed Orcutt*

Rep. Tom Mielke

Rep. Ed Orcutt



ECONOMY: HELP WASHINGTON PROSPER AGAIN

With signs the U.S. economy is rebounding, it's important our state be positioned for similar **economic expansion** and not be left behind. As Rep. Orcutt puts it, our top three priorities as your representatives are: **jobs, jobs and jobs.**

First, we need to **preserve the jobs we already have in our state.** Second, we want to make those jobs better through actions like health-care reform, which could allow employers to afford **medical coverage for their workers.** And third, we're working to help employers reduce the costs of doing business, so they can **expand and create new jobs.**

Boeing's decision to assemble its 7E7 airplane in Everett is great news. This is a perfect example of what can happen when legislators and business leaders **come together for a common cause.** Washington keeps an important company and industry in-state and is **viewed nationwide as more employer-friendly.**

However, we must not stop here. Employers in Southwest Washington deserve legislative help too! Here's what we need to do next to create a climate that helps job providers be more competitive:

- Reform the state-run workers' compensation system (for example, allowing private firms to offer industrial insurance would help)
- Increase the small-business tax credit for the first time in 10 years, to help Washington's small employers survive. Rep. Orcutt, who addresses tax and revenue issues as a member of the House Finance Committee, introduced a bill on the session's first day (House Bill 2317) that would **increase the tax credit** for small businesses – helping 17,000 employers.
- Reduce the regulatory burden that makes it more costly to do business in Washington. Rep. Orcutt is sponsoring House Bill 2434, which would require legislative hearings on rules proposed by state agencies.
- Renew tax incentives for high-tech industries that have been in place for the past decade – allowing them to expire this year would cost jobs we can't afford to lose.



BUDGET: BE SMART ABOUT SPENDING

Our state's financial picture is much better now than this time last year. Some legislators wanted to increase taxes in 2003; instead, the Legislature decided on realistic solutions that prevented a huge budget deficit.

This year we will adopt a supplemental budget to cover spending changes that couldn't have been anticipated when the budget was adopted last year – things like higher K-12 school enrollments, and the cost of fighting last summer's wildfires.

The Legislature needs to be **fiscally responsible** with the 2004 supplemental budget by following the same sound principles that guided us in 2003. This includes, among other things, **funding essential services without raising general-fund taxes.**

Unfortunately, the governor's proposed supplemental budget is not fiscally responsible. If it passed, our reserves would be substantially reduced and our budget could be more than \$1 billion in the red by the next biennium. We can't let this happen.

While some of the governor's ideas are worth considering, we should strive for a more balanced effort that **finds savings in the existing budget to offset expenditures.** We need to end this biennium with an operating budget that can be carried into the future without needing tax increases or reductions of core state services.

LET'S PUT 'JUSTICE' BACK IN OUR CIVIL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Our tort system gives citizens an opportunity to recover damages from those liable. When we talk of the need for tort reform, many people think in terms of the medical industry, and understandably so. Premiums for medical malpractice insurance are soaring, causing an alarming number of health care providers to simply quit or leave our state – which in turn reduces access to health care services.

But the same holds true for almost every other industry. Employers are struggling to pay ever-increasing premiums to protect themselves against lawsuits, and, as consumers, we share the burden. It raises the cost of medical insurance, adds to the cost of constructing a new home, and limits options for after-school programs.

We plan to work this session to support almost a dozen reforms to the tort liability laws of our state that would restore justice to our civil justice system. These include a cap on non-economic damages, and requiring people to prove – to an official third party – that a claim has merit before it is filed. We can and should do better for service providers, consumers and citizens in general, for adopting a fair, predictable and timely process for addressing liability.

PUBLIC SAFETY: PROTECTING FAMILIES, PROPERTY & NEIGHBORHOODS

■ **Combating meth use and production:** Our communities are increasingly plagued by methamphetamine, a highly addictive and cheaply produced illegal drug, and its harmful effects. More must be done to **eliminate meth production and use**. As Ranking Republican of the House Criminal Justice & Corrections Committee, Rep. Mielke is leading a charge to make the **manufacturing of meth a strike under the state's "Three Strikes" law**. In 1997, the Legislature passed such a measure but Governor Locke vetoed it. Since then, the number of meth labs in Washington has soared.

■ **Protecting your family from sex offenders:** Life can change when a sex offender moves into your neighborhood, to the point that you become a victim of a different kind. The way to keep sex offenders out of our neighborhoods is to **deal with them severely on the first offense** and keep them in prison as long as possible.

When sex offenders are released, we should assure they go to transition homes in areas that are not residential. We should increase penalties for violating registration requirements, and parents should be given the ability to find out if registered sex offenders are attending certain schools.

■ **Preparing for wildfires and floods:** The past few years have brought stark reminders of the devastation of wildfires and floods. Unfortunately, **we've fallen short on preparedness**.

We must do more to prevent human-caused wildfires and **mitigate the loss of lives and property**. Cutting and removing the underbrush of at-risk, public forests near towns and cities will help. So will streamlining regulatory reviews and putting responsibility in the hands of state authorities who best understand their forests' risks. Finally, let's bring loss-prevention experts from the public and private sectors together to educate the public on wildfires. The state Department of Natural Resources offers a Backyard Forest Stewardship/Wildfire Safety Kit with tips for protecting your home and forest. Call 1-888-783-9548 to have a copy mailed to you.

Learning more about our state's flood plains is crucial to **educating people about the potential for disaster**. Land development must include wise decision-making, as improper risk assessments can foster a false sense of security for homeowners. Homeowners need to know, up front, the risk of building on a flood plain. If they choose to do so, they should be expected to **adopt long-term, sustainable approaches that undertake comprehensive mitigation activities**.



TRANSPORTATION: LEARNING LESSONS

Traffic congestion is getting worse each year. Yet, voters didn't reject building new roads when they opposed Referendum 51 – they rejected government's "business as usual" attitude toward transportation. House Republicans responded in 2003 with the Five-for-Five plan, a funding proposal that required five reforms to be adopted before increasing revenues – the reverse of Ref. 51. Unfortunately, instead of five reforms, taxpayers got the five-cent tax increase.

The majority of that plan has yet to be enacted, particularly two points: **increasing transportation permit efficiency and reforming prevailing wage laws.** Their passage will be among Rep. Mielke's priorities again this session.

■ **Increasing transportation permit efficiency:** The transportation permit process is a lengthy, bureaucratic nightmare. Streamlining it while continuing to protect our environment will result in a lot of cost-savings and ensure quality in construction of transportation projects.

■ **Reforming prevailing-wage laws:** Public works projects should not be included in the calculation of the prevailing wage. The prevailing-wage statute should only apply to projects of \$250,000 or more. And on a project subject to federal and state prevailing-wage laws, the federal rate should apply. These changes will save tax dollars and go a long way toward increasing transportation revenues.

JOIN YOUR 18TH DISTRICT TEAM AT A TOWN HALL MEETING!

Judging from recent years, many of the most important decisions we will make this session will come in the final weeks of the session. Saturday, February 28, would be an ideal time to hear your thoughts and concerns, so we may carry them back to the Capitol. Please mark your calendar and plan to join Senator Zarelli and us at one of these meetings!

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28

10-11:30 a.m.

**Meeting Rooms A & B • Camas Public Library
625 NE 4th Ave., Camas**

1-2:30 p.m.

**Public Meeting Room • Three Creeks Library
800 NE Tenney Rd., Salmon Creek**

3:30-5 p.m.

**City Council Chambers • Kalama City Hall
320 N 1st St., Kalama**

18TH DISTRICT UPDATE

 Printed on recycled paper

P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

**REP. TOM MIELKE
REP. ED ORCUTT**

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Washington State
Department of Printing